**PROLOGUE**

IKIGAI: A MYSTERIOUS WORD

This book first came into being on a rainy night in Tokyo, when its authors sat down together for the first time in one of the city’s tiny bars.

We had read each other’s work but had never met, thanks to the thousand of miles that separate Barcelona from the capital of Japan. Then a mutual acquaintance put us in touch, launching a friendship that led to this project and seems destined to last a lifetime.

The next time we got together, a year later, we strolled through a park in downtown Tokyo and ended up talking about trends in Western psychology, specifically logotherapy, which helps people find their purpose in life.

We remarked that Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy had gone out of fashion among practicing therapists, who favored other schools of psychology, though people still search for meaning in what they do and how they live. We ask ourselves things like:

What is the meaning of my life?

Is the point just to live longer, or should I seek a higher purpose?

Why do some people know what they want and have a passion for life, while others languish in confusion?

At some point in our conversation, the mysterious word ikigai came up.

This Japanese concept, which translates roughly as “the happiness of always being busy,” is like logotherapy, but it goes a step beyond. It also seems to be one way of explaining the extraordinary longevity of the Japanese, especially on the island of Okinawa, where there are 24.55 people over the age of 100 for every 100,000 inhabitants - far more than the global average.

Those who study why the inhabitants of this island in the south of Japan live longer than people anywhere else in the world believe that one of the keys - in addition to a healthful diet, a simple life in the outdoors, green tea, and the subtropical climate (its average temperature is like that of Hawaii) - is the ikigai that shapes their lives.